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RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 4768  
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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 4798  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 3222  
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 5571  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2409  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0634  
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RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 1795  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 5860  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 7849  
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0689  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 1060  
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RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 002882

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XXXX  
DA WASHDC FOR SASA  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA  
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. FAA Downgrading of Israeli Aviation Status

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media quoted Syrian President Bashar Assad as saying yesterday, following PM Ehud Olmert's talks in Ankara, that he believes direct peace talks with Israel are possible and that they will eventually take place. Assad said that direct talks were necessary. The media reported that Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu visited the Golan and stated that Israel would stay on the Golan regardless of what Olmert signs.

The media reported that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called FM Tzipi Livni to Cairo to discuss renewing a cease-fire in Gaza. She will travel there on Thursday. The media quoted Hamas leaders as saying that a 24-hour cease-fire would go into effect. A senior militant of Hamas's military branch told Maariv that this truce was over. The Jerusalem Post quoted senior Israeli defense officials as saying that an operation will be launched against Hamas in Gaza even if the terrorist group heeds an Egyptian request and reduces its rocket attacks against Israel. Maariv reported that DM Ehud Barak is considering responding with artillery fire at the areas from where Qassam rockets and mortar shells are launched. HaQaretz quoted senior government sources in Jerusalem as saying that an international player they would not name is attempting to renew talks between Israel and Hamas about the cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. The sources were quoted as saying that the contacts were currently at the level of initial feelers.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the Bush administration appears to be using its final weeks to crack down on Iranian business interests in the U.S., freezing assets of a company suspected of indirectly supporting Tehran's nuclear program, and arresting Farshid Jahedi, the executive of a related charity.

HaQaretz and The Jerusalem Post cited an AP report quoting Russia's state arms export agency as saying yesterday that it is supplying Iran with defensive weapons, including surface-to-air missiles, but that they did not say whether they include sophisticated long-range S-300 missiles.

Media reported that yesterday the Meretz central committee approved joining the new leftist party.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza warned yesterday that more violence and the

continued blockade are a Qrecipe for disasterQ in Gaza.

The Jerusalem Post quoted National Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer as saying in Jordan, at the latest Euro-Med conference, that Israel is a willing partner in signing a water management cooperation agreement.

Israel Radio reported that British tax authorities have stepped up their examinations of goods from Israel to ensure that goods that originate in the settlements not be given a customs exemption. The British envoy to the Middle East said in Jerusalem that Britain was also working in the EU to promote criteria for marking goods from the settlements. Britain is about to change its travel advisory to its citizens visiting the territories and to recommend that they not buy property in the settlements. The London government said that if a peace agreement were reached with the Palestinians or Syria, this was liable to cause losses to people buying such property. The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel will not fight an advisory by the British against buying property over the Green Line.

The media reported that the Kadima primaries my have been tainted with corruption,

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Yona Metzger sent a letter to President Bush asking that he pardon convicted spy Jonathan Pollard before leaving office.

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1. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QAnyone who thinks it is possible to topple the Hamas regime -- if this is at all possible without occupying Gaza -- either does not want to listen to the IDF's assessments or is deluding himself.

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QSenior security officials underscored yesterday that the Egyptians were not engaged in mediating between Israel and Hamas in hope of renewing the tahdiya. They said that the Egyptians were deeply insulted by Hamas.

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QZahar must know that the terms that he is talking about aren't plausible at present.... That might be the reason why Hamas's official and declared policy contradicts Zahar's demands. No one is seriously talking about renewing the agreement at present.

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in Yediot Aharonot: Q[Assad] is in a hurry, in words dripping with sweetness, to extract the QdepositQ from Olmert and get on the highway to office of the new president in the White House.

Gilad Sharon, the son of former prime minister Ariel Sharon, wrote in Yediot Aharonot: QWhat [Olmert] has achieved is shackle his successor.... He knows exactly how the public will remember him.

Palestinian columnist Daoud Kuttab wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: QWhether or not the activities of regional leaders will ensure that the peace process is irreversible is hard to tell.

Block Quotes:  
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1I. "Lightning and Thunder"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (12/23): QIf there is a solution to the Gaza problem, it is not going to come from hysteria and pressure, but through brainpower and deliberation. With respect to these, no one can compete with Barak and his cold, razor-sharp judgment.... It is also important that Israel have international support for any action it decides on -- experience, after all, shows that an operation in the midst of a civilian population can bring the world's wrath down on us if women and children are killed. Anyone who thinks it is possible to topple the Hamas regime -- if this is at all possible without occupying Gaza -- either does not want to listen to the IDF's assessments or is deluding himself. Have the Americans already succeeded in uprooting the Taliban? Anyone who believes that going into Gaza for a limited operation is a trivial matter is deceiving himself and the public. Especially in light of Hamas' long-range rockets, which are capable of reaching ... the outskirts of Beersheva. However, there are many degrees on Israel's scale of responses, and in my opinion the decision to act has already been taken.

II. "The Clock Is Ticking"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/23): QQAll of the preparations leading up to military activity in the Gaza Strip are moving ahead as planned,Q said yesterday a high-ranking security official against the backdrop of what was cast by the Palestinians as a 24-hour lull. QAs far as we are concerned, the clock of military preparations has continued to tick as planned. If Hamas truly maintains full quiet for at least 24 hours, only then will it be possible to begin to think about stopping that ticking clock.Q QAs far as Israel is concerned,Q said the high-ranking source, Qno state of Qtahdiya [calm] was recorded yesterday. Hamas failed even to meet its own conditions in order to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza. That is why the border crossings have remained closed and we won't allow the passage of the humanitarian convoy that was sent by the Egyptians. The Egyptian aid convoy was supposed to enter the Gaza Strip via the Kerem Shalom crossing, but a Qassam rocket landed near that border crossing yesterday, prompting an Israeli decision not to permit the border crossings to be opened. The border crossings are not planned to be opened today either. Senior security officials underscored yesterday that the Egyptians were not engaged in mediating between Israel and Hamas in hope of renewing the tandiya. They said that

the Egyptians were deeply insulted by Hamas.

### III. "The Zahar Show"

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (12/23): QThe terms [senior Hamas official Mahmoud] Zahar was talking about [yesterday] were never agreed to. Hamas demanded that the blockade on the Gaza Strip be lifted.... The second issue cited by Zahar, to extend the truce agreement to Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank] as well, was something that Israel never agreed to.... Zahar must know that the terms that he is talking about aren't plausible at present. He has already conceded publicly that the tension between Hamas and Egypt has reached new heights, and Israel has no intention of meeting its demands. That might be the reason why Hamas's official and declared policy contradicts Zahar's demands. No one is seriously talking about renewing the agreement at present.

### IV. "The Goal: To Shackle the Next Prime Minister"

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in Yediot Aharonot (12/23): QThe goal is clear: the Prime Minister is soon leaving office and Assad is trying to extract from him something that will go down in the history of the negotiations as the QOlmert deposit. Such a formulation would obligate, so he hopes, the next prime ministerQNetanyahu or Livni. But the Golan is not AssadQs only interest: in the immediate short-term, his most burning interest is in ridding himself of the hump that has been on his back for three years now in the form of the international tribunal investigating the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri.... Assad did not become a peace-seeker yesterday. The Turkish steamroller pressured him to release a statement that would sound good to the ears of the new U.S. administration and get Olmert, upon his return from Ankara, to paint a positive picture of the Syrian presidentQs determination and tenacity. And yet, nobody forgets for a moment that the Hamas leadership lives with him in Damascus and dictates reality in Gaza. Assad does not intend to quell Hamas or to stop encouraging Hizbullah. But he is in a hurry, in words dripping with sweetness, to extract the QdepositQ from Olmert and get on the highway to the office of the new President in the White House.

### IV. QDifferent Dreams

Gilad Sharon, the son of former PM Ariel Sharon, wrote in Yediot Aharonot (12/23): QIt is unpleasant to attack someone whoQs already irrelevant, but there is no limit to OlmertQs cynicism. What is this trip to Turkey and his pathetic attempts to get by force an agreement with Syria? There wonQt be such an agreement. But what he has achieved is shackle his successor.... He knows exactly how the public will remember him.... Peace with Israel and the Golan do not really interest [Assad]. Olmert and AssadQs dreams are different, The former wants an embrace from Assad -- a picture that would erase an embarrassing term. What the latter wants is survive with his small Alawite sect as the head of their minority dictatorship in Syria.

### VI. QIs the Peace Process Irreversible?

Palestinian columnist Daoud Kuttub wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (12/22): QThe efforts of the Americans, Israelis, and Palestinians come as a way of ensuring that whatever government is elected by Israelis in February will not attempt to reverse the accomplishments already made.... For Palestinians and to a lesser degree Israelis, [last weekQs] Security Council Resolution was not very reassuring. While important, statements by Qurei and even Olmert did little to provide hope and optimism for people who are fed up with words and public declarations. The status of Palestinians, especially in regards to Gaza, is a much higher source of concern than any public statements.... Whether or not the activities of regional leaders will ensure that the peace process is irreversible is hard to tell.

### 12. FAA Downgrading of Israeli Aviation Status:

#### Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QA failure of this magnitude entails ministerial responsibility, and it falls entirely on one man -- the current transportation minister, Shaul Mofaz.

#### Block Quotes:

"Mofaz Is to Blame"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (12/23): QThe U.S. Federal Aviation Administration's decision to downgrade Israel's flight safety rating came as no surprise.... Successive Israeli transportation ministers, from Yisrael Kessar [in the 1990s] to Shaul Mofaz, have all treated the Civil Aviation Administration [CAA] and the Israel Airports Authority as convenient places to make political appointments, and have allowed the criminal neglect to continue. They all heard the professionals' warnings about the CAA's haplessness, about the inefficacy of turning it into an agency with lots of money but very little power, and about the dangers this entailed.... The next transportation and finance ministers will have to quickly enact a thorough reform of the Civil Aviation Administration to rescue Israel from the developing-world classification into which it has cornered itself. But a failure of this magnitude entails ministerial responsibility, and it falls entirely on one man -- the current transportation minister, Shaul Mofaz.

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